
Coalition for Affordable Housing and Transit
110 East Geer Street, Durham, NC 27701

August 21, 2015

Ms. Lucy Garliauskas
FTA, Associate Administrator
Planning and Environment
United States Department of Transportation
East Building 1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Re: Request of the Research Triangle Regional Public Transportation Authority to Enter the New Starts Engineering Phase for the Proposed Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit Project

Dear Ms. Garliauskas:

The Coalition of Affordable Housing and Transit (CAHT) writes to express its support for the request of the Research Triangle Regional Public Transportation Authority (GoTriangle), to enter into the New Starts Engineering Phase for the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit Project (Project). Our support is founded on the commitment of GoTriangle to work in partnership with the governing bodies in Durham and Orange Counties to take appropriate steps to expand transit access to disadvantaged, transit dependent and low income members of our community, as well as support the preservation of existing affordable housing in transit corridors and development of additional affordable units near new transit stations and bus hubs.

CAHT is made up of representatives from all the major neighborhood, faith based and community groups in Durham, including, but not limited to, the Durham Congregations, Associations and Neighborhoods (CAN), NAACP, Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People, Durham Congregations In Action (DCIA), People's Alliance, People's Durham, and the Durham InterNeighborhood Council. In addition, there are appointed members from City and County advisory bodies such as the Planning Commission and Durham Housing Authority. CAHT also has an advisory committee made up of former members of the local governing, administrative and advisory bodies, including the N. C. General Assembly, Durham City Council, GoTriangle, Special Transportation Advisory Commission, City County Planning Department, Open Space and Trails Commission, Bicycle-Pedestrian Advisory Commission, the Department of Social Services and Homeless Services Advisory Committee. In addition there are representatives from Self-Help, Durham's community development financial institution, Community Reinvestment Partners and Durham Community Land Trustees who have provided technical assistance. Also, there are representatives from organizations that campaigned for the referendum for a sales tax dedicated to providing the local match for the new transit plan including the Durham Orange Friends of Transit and the Chamber of Commerce.

CAHT has served in several capacities over the last 3 years. Primarily, it has been the voice and educational resource for the disadvantaged, transit dependent and low-income members of our community. Public transportation has long been part of the fabric of daily life in Durham and Orange Counties and through the leadership of our local governing bodies, we have made great strides connecting job seekers with job opportunities and creating new opportunities for our children and grandchildren. However, without careful planning there can be unintended consequences to the detriment of our community.

CAHT has worked with GoTriangle and the local governing bodies to widen the circle in which people can find and get to new jobs with seamless connections by all modes of transit reaching into all the neighborhoods – those that are booming and those that, over time, have been left behind. We have encouraged growth that creates sustainable neighborhoods.

CAHT representatives were deeply involved in supporting the passage of referendums for a sales tax dedicated to transit. With its passage, we have seen some of the rewards with millions of dollars in transit-oriented development. However, in the campaign we committed to work to make Durham and Orange an example of a well-planned, well-connected transit network that can truly transform a metropolitan area. In addition, we promised to advocate for transit improvements that provide a ladder of opportunity by modernizing and expanding our transit services to connect disadvantaged, transit dependent and low-income individuals, veterans, seniors, youth and others with local workforce training, jobs, health care, centers of government and other vital services. We also are dedicated to ensure that the transit improvements would put local people to work with a living wage building the Project and help them get training for careers in transportation.

Following up on our commitments, CAHT has worked with the local governing bodies to adopt a resolution in 2014 which sets a goal to preserve and increase the stock of affordable housing so that at least fifteen percent (15%) of housing units within one half-mile of each rail transit station and bus hub will be affordable to families with incomes less than sixty percent (60%) of area median income.

To insure the goal is fully pursued, the governing bodies included in the resolution an instruction to their respective managers to “take all necessary steps” to implement the goal. In addition, the governing bodies have supported the work of the City County Planning Department to make the Project safe and easily accessible for pedestrians and cyclists by improving streets and sidewalks.

We are also working collaboratively with GoTriangle to ensure that the transit system is designed to take into account the needs of low-income and transit dependent persons, including those not living near the new transit stations and bus hubs, by expanding high quality bus service into the larger community which will provide easy access to the stations and hubs.

Another role of CAHT has been to implement a public-involvement and education effort in partnership with GoTriangle to include all neighborhoods and communities in our metropolitan area. We have provided information and engaged in surveying in many neighborhoods that are affected by the Project to insure that all interests, values and viewpoints are considered. We support the request of GoTriangle to enter the engineering phase because of its commitment to take these findings into consideration in its future planning and to continue to have meaningful and improved community engagement.

CAHT has also been collaborating with the City County Planning Department, GoTriangle and the local governing bodies to ensure that there are multiple financing mechanisms for creating and preserving affordable housing and ensuring that the benefits and burdens of an expanded transit system are equitably shared. We have been in discussions about multiple options including, but not limited to, land banking, low income housing tax credits, a toolbox of developer incentives, a housing trust fund, targeted tax increment financing, use of public land and other strategies.

CAHT supports the vision of GoTriangle and the overall design of the Project even as concerns about certain details in the plan are being expressed. GoTriangle has demonstrated a willingness and commitment to work closely with neighborhoods, local Planning departments and other stakeholders in order to find solutions for these concerns.

Durham and Orange Counties are at a crossroads due to predicted large population growth, driven substantially by Millennials and seniors. Instead of turning to less ambitious projects that fill immediate needs, CAHT is working to meet the challenges and opportunities of future growth with a long-term transportation solution that will set an example for other communities – an example that helps move all people safely and efficiently to where they need to go, while contributing to cleaner air, making our nation more energy independent and increasing equitable access to jobs, training, centers of government and vital services.

Sincerely yours,

Wib Gulley, for the
Executive Committee
Coalition for Affordable Housing and Transit